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Agenda item 4 (c)
Programme questions: evaluation

Conference room paper on proposals for future thematic evaluations by the Office of Internal Oversight Services

I. Introduction

1. At its forty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services to undertake a pilot thematic evaluation on the topic of linkages between headquarters and field activities: a review of best practices for poverty eradication within the framework of the Millennium Declaration. That report is being presented to the Committee at its forty-fifth session (E/AC.51/2005/2). It provides an assessment of the cross-cutting topic of headquarters/field linkages and also reviews coordination and collaboration among programmes with common goals and objectives related to poverty eradication.

II. Experience with pilot thematic evaluation

2. The overall experience with conducting the pilot thematic evaluation was positive. The cross-cutting nature of the topic engaged a wide audience and was of relevance and significance to multiple United Nations programmes. In fact, one of the greatest challenges in this first effort was the need to more narrowly focus the evaluation, given the resources and time frame with which it was conducted. Furthermore, it was critical that the methodology utilized for the evaluation encompassed a broad range of data-collection activities, including field visits, surveys of headquarters and field staff, expert consultations, document reviews and analyses of programmed data.

3. Several key lessons learned from the pilot can be applied to subsequent thematic evaluations. These include the importance of:

(a) Determining the appropriate scope of the evaluation, including whether the evaluation will incorporate a broader, system-wide perspective if the topic warrants such an approach;

(b) Employing a variety of methods;

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(c) Undertaking a stakeholder analysis to identify key stakeholders;

(d) Engaging in a consultative process with these stakeholders;

(e) Establishing an advisory group to provide guidance and feedback throughout the evaluation process;

(f) Developing recommendations that appropriately address systemic weaknesses and feed into ongoing discussions and initiatives;

(g) Scheduling the evaluation to ensure adequate time to review the topic with sufficient rigour.

III. Topics for thematic evaluation in 2006

4. The Office of Internal Oversight Services proposes that the Committee for Programme and Coordination decide on a topic for the next thematic evaluation, to be presented at its forty-sixth session, in 2006. To facilitate this decision, four proposals are presented below. These topics meet the selection criteria outlined in the Office of Internal Oversight Services report on further development of topics for a pilot thematic evaluation (see E/AC.51/2004/2, para. 13). Specifically, all the topics are timely, strategic, significant to intergovernmental reviews and relevant to current issues in the United Nations. All four would also contribute to enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in United Nations programmes.

5. These topics have been selected after consultation with numerous United Nations entities. Specifically, the Office of Internal Oversight Services consulted the following inter-agency bodies: the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), the United Nations Development Group, the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs and the Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs. The Office of Internal Oversight Services also consulted with the Joint Inspection Unit, as well as with programme managers in relevant departments and offices.

A. Knowledge management networks

Context

6. The Secretary-General's reform detailed a framework of organizational change to equip the Organization with tools to address the challenges of globalization and the associated issues that are framed within the Millennium Declaration. Specific recommendations were made to strengthen information dissemination practices via the establishment of knowledge networks.[1] Further, the Office of Internal Oversight Services thematic evaluation report on headquarters/field linkages for poverty eradication identified knowledge management networks as a best practice, facilitating coordination and collaboration among United Nations entities in headquarters, regional and country offices.[2] The preliminary analysis of the Office of Internal Oversight Services identified 24 electronic knowledge management networks that currently operate within the United Nations system, both within and

[1] See A/57/387, para. 119.

[2] See E/AC.51/2005/2, paras. 55-57.

beyond the Secretariat. This analysis reveals extensive variability within the technological functionality of the networks, overlapping topics and overlapping memberships.

Objective

7. The objective of this thematic evaluation would be to assess the requirements, utilization and effectiveness of knowledge management networks within the United Nations Secretariat as well as to identify ways in which these networks could be used more strategically.

Scope

8. This evaluation would focus on the type and nature of existing networks in the United Nations Secretariat. It would identify how knowledge is transferred between Secretariat entities in order to further interrelated programme goals. Furthermore, as many networks address thematic issues, there is potential to duplicate activities and discussions. Therefore, the evaluation would address how network managers address potential areas of overlap and distribute relevant information to other interrelated networks. Finally, the evaluation would determine how knowledge management networks in the Secretariat interact with those in funds and programmes, and elsewhere.

B. Gender mainstreaming

Context

9. Advancing the global agenda on women's issues and gender equality has been a significant component of the work of the United Nations and specifically discussed at numerous global conferences and agreements. Economic and Social Council resolution 2004/4 on the review of the Council's agreed conclusions 1997/2 on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system requests the Secretary-General to ensure that all United Nations entities develop action plans with time lines for implementing the agreed conclusions 1997/2. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in September 1995, resulted in the Beijing Platform for Action, which constitutes an agenda for women's empowerment. Further, the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, in 2000, reaffirmed the need for gender mainstreaming. The Commission on the Status of Women completed its forty-ninth session in March 2005 with a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The appraisal focused on implementation at the national level. However, no assessment of how United Nations programmes are mainstreaming gender into their planning and activities has been completed.

Objective

10. The objective of this thematic evaluation would be to determine the extent, nature and effectiveness of gender mainstreaming in Secretariat programmes.

Scope

11. This evaluation would focus on programmes in the Secretariat, specifically examining the policies, mechanisms and resources available to ensure the integration of a gender perspective into programme mandates, functions and activities. The evaluation would also identify best practices in gender mainstreaming in the Secretariat and in funds and programmes by providing an analysis of what makes these practices effective. Finally, the evaluation would examine coordination and collaboration around gender mainstreaming activities. Secretariat staffing issues would not be included in this assessment.

C. Follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits

Context

12. United Nations conferences and summits held since the 1990s have generated global consensus on policies and actions to advance poverty eradication and sustainable development and have given renewed relevance to the work of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields. General Assembly resolution 57/270 B provides guidance for entities to work in a complementary way in implementing the outcomes of these conferences and summits. The resolution specifically calls for an integrated and coordinated approach to action at the national, regional and international levels. Secretariat programmes in particular have responsibility for follow-up activities related to their respective sectors.

Objective

13. The objective of this thematic evaluation would be to determine how the Secretariat has undertaken integrated and coordinated follow-up to the major United Nations conferences and summits.

Scope

14. This evaluation would focus on a sample of four or five major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields over the last decade (1995-2005). It would specifically focus on the particular modalities for follow-up, including monitoring and reporting on implementation, dissemination of norms and guidelines, operational activities, publications and scheduling of follow-up meetings. The evaluation would also assess coordination among Secretariat entities in their follow-up mechanisms and activities.

D. Inter-agency coordinating bodies

Context

15. The Secretary-General's 1997 reform established four Executive Committees to bring together and coordinate various United Nations entities around core sectors of the Organization. These four are the Executive Committee on Peace and Security, the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Executive Committee of the United Nations Development Group. In 2001, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board (CEB) for Coordination (formerly the Administrative Committee on Coordination)

was established to provide a forum for bringing together executive heads of all organizations to increase coordination and cooperation throughout the United Nations system.

Objective

16. The objective of this thematic evaluation would be to review the functioning and effectiveness of CEB and the four Executive Committees established through United Nations reform in 1997.

Scope

17. This evaluation would focus on the respective roles, responsibilities and activities of the coordinating bodies. It would also review the coordination between them. It would determine the relevance and impact of the five inter-agency bodies on Secretariat programmes, including how conclusions and decisions reached by these bodies influence policy and programme development for Secretariat programmes.